POST OFFICE AND PUBLIC

Letter Writers Here Cause Much Trouble.

MAIL RECEIPTS ARE INCREASING

People Fail to Co-Operate With Department and Make Uncalled for Complaints.

Co-operation on the part of the public will do wonders toward assisting the Honolulu postoffice in the rapid assorting and delivery of the mails. Much of the complaint now being launched against the postoffice management is uncalled for and the cause relates more to the people of this city and all the towns on the Islands than to the postoffice itself.

An investigation of the manner in which the mails are handled in the local office convinces the observer that there are conditions and difficulties to be overcome here which are not met elsewhere in an American city. The cosmopolitan character of the population, the lack of street addresses and box numbers on letters received from abroad and the time of arrival and departure of the mails establishes the fact that the Honolulu office cannot be compared to any office in the United States.

An Advertiser reporter was escorted through the various departments of the postoffice yesterday by Chief Clerk Louis Kenake, who outlined the methods now in vogue in handling the mass of letters, papers and packages which come in and go out of the small building which houses Uncle Sam's postal facilities in Honolulu. The manner in which each letter is received at the side door from the mail wagons, its removal from the pouch in which it has traveled perhaps thousands of miles, the stamping of the Honolulu date-mark, the assortment with letters for private boxes, general delivery or for sacks for other Islands, was carefully followed. One can realize only by observation what a fine system Uncle Sam employs in caring for the smallest and largest of packages and at the same time the tremendous difficulties which are encountered by the small force of sixteen men of all nationalities who "work" the mail.

Honolulans have not forgotten the old methods of sending out their city and Island mail, and it is due to many of the large business houses that so much unnecessary work is exacted of the clerks. In the olden days of the monarchical and republican postoffices, when everybody knew everybody else and it was unnecessary to write on a letter more than plain "John Smith City," the letters found their addressees promptly. Today, when the mail matter received at the postoffice from the ocean steamers amounts to more than four times what it did two years ago, with clerks constantly being changed, plain "John Smith, City," or "James Brown, Honolulu," is not sufficient to insure proper delivery. Letters in this day and age must be addressed with the full name, address or box number. By so doing the clerks are relieved of the constant worry as to which "John Smith" it is, and whether he has a box or whether it goes into the mass of letters which are found at the general delivery window.

"Here is an instance of this very thing," said Mr. Kenake, reaching to the assorting table and taking a handful of letters just deposited by a well known business firm. The envelopes, inscribed with the firm name, contained the monthly statement of account and they were but a small part of the thousands of such envelopes which have been dropped into the postoffice since April 1.

"Here is one directed to 'John G——.' The clerk, when he picks that up, has to think quickly and he must know whether that person has a box or whether he gets his mail at the general delivery window. The next question arises, 'Which window?' You would not suppose from a glance at it that this man is a Hawaiian. I happen to know him, as I do almost every one in town. Well, some clerk who doesn't know 'John G——' would naturally pitch the letter into 'General Delivery,' and 'John G——' would inquire in vain at the Hawaiian window for his letter. So you see we have to remember many things and the clerks heads are just crammed with such data. What's in a name? Well, just ask any of the clerks and they will tell you.

"The business houses are not careful in this matter and if they knew that they were the ones that caused so much of the complaints that pour into the office weekly, I am sure they would rectify their present methods. Do you imagine for a moment a San Francisco firm would send out a bunch of envelopes like these? No, sir; they know that they would reach the dead letter office eventually, and in the case of papers, etc., the fire. Many such letters dropped into the boxes here find their way to the dead letter office. I have been in this office for eight years and know pretty nearly everybody and often save letters from being sent to the dead letter office, but suppose I am sick and the mail is worked by comparatively new clerks, a great many people in this city will wait in vain for their letters.

"Another thing is that those people who have boxes forget to inform their correspondents that their box number is so-and-so. Of course we all know that prominent men have such-and-such a box, but when the number is not on the letter the boys have got to think it out each time. How much better it would be if these letters had 'Box No. 701,' etc., on them, as the case may be. The clerks don't have to read the names—just the numbers.

"Here are a few statistics which I believe will interest the Honolulu public: The mails are increasing every month. When I came here eight years ago we were getting an accumulation of four bags a day in San Francisco for Honolulu. Six days' mail then meant about twenty-five bags of mail for this place, which was really nothing to speak of. Up to June 14 last it had increased to sixteen bags daily, and since then it has doubled—thirty-two sacks a day. You can readily understand what it is to receive eight days' later mail, which means about 256 sacks. It literally swamps the office. On the transport Hancock which arrived last Monday we received 225 sacks of mail. That was an average of thirty-seven bags a day accumulating in San Francisco. The vessel following a day later—the Peking—brought fifty bags of mail which had accumulated in twenty-four hours. On the Sonoma we expect 150 bags. With sixteen men 'working' the Hancock mail, that was an average of about fourteen sacks of mail to each man. The Hancock and Peking mail was all finished Wednesday afternoon at 5 o'clock. The Hancock first class mail was finished at 4 o'clock the day of its arrival.

"In postoffices in the States employes come on at 8 a. m. and leave at 5 or 6, and a fresh crowd comes on, they in turn being relieved the next morning. When mail comes to us the men have to work steadily until it is all out. They are not relieved by fresh crowds, and considering all this I think we do very well."

In the new addition to the postoffice are arranged the "pitching racks" metal racks which are supplied with hooks to hold sacks up. The name of a postoffice set in the frame above the open mouth of the sack shows the clerk where to pitch a piece of mail, usually papers. A paper after being deposited in the drop box is taken out, the stamp cancelled and then thrown on the assorting table. From this point the clerk throws the paper to the proper bag. With fifty gaping mouths he necessarily becomes expert. He has to judge the distance, weight of paper, and the paper must go into the right sack, or he will eventually hear from headquarters. A semicircular rack holds about a dozen sacks, above which are the labels, "New York City," "N. Y. Foreign," taking in the European and South American mail, which is separated at New York city; "Chicago," "Washington, D. C.," "N. Y. & Chic. R. P. O.," taking in New England points, the mail being separated on the trains; "Portland and S. F.," mail for the Pacific Coast states, separated at San Francisco; "Ogden & S. F.," mail for Middle and Western states. "S. F. Dis." is the mail for Tahiti and other places, separated at San Francisco. By this means the mails are despatched along the routes from twenty-four to thirty-six hours earlier than if the mail was separated and distributed at San Francisco, as in former years. If mails are properly pouched and labelled here and a vessel arrives in San Francisco in time to catch an outgoing transcontinental train, the sacks are transferred direct without the formality of going through the San Francisco postoffice.

"Pitching," as the clerks term it, is one of the proficient arts of the postoffice service, and after considerable practice the men rarely fail of their mark. Failure to hit the right sack means a tiresome walk around the racks to extract the paper and place it properly.

The Japanese and Chinese mail is made up in a separate pigeonhole case, clerks of these nationalities being employed. The mails are very large. The Asiatics send away in the neighborhood of 10,000 and 15,000 letters and papers by each Oriental steamer. The bulk of it comes in on the Island boats to Honolulu. Two clerks handle the entire mail and are considered quite accurate. Mails for Southern China go direct to Hongkong; that for Northern China is redistributed at Yokohama.

The Island mails are difficult to handle. There is a rush of mail on Tuesday, the general sailing day from Honolulu of the Island steamers, and the office is taxed to its utmost to "tie up" and start the bags on their journeys, as oftentimes changes in the sacking of "tie-ups" of mail matter have to be made. The rules of the postoffice are that as much of the equipment as possible shall be in the postoffice and not out upon the road, and the postmaster is compelled to use as few sacks as possible whenever convenient.

On Good Friday afternoon the addresses in the Cathedral on the Seven Words from the Cross will be given by the Bishop. He proposes to treat those seven sayings as inculcating the following seven lessons of Christian faith and practice: 1. A spirit of forgiveness. 2. Hope of rest in Paradise. 3. Self-forgetfulness for the sake of others. 4. The use of the Psalms for communings with God. 5. Thirsting for righteousness. 6. Devotion to duty. 7. Perfect trust in God through Christ.—Diocesan Magazine.